



# Ohio 4-H Youth Development Research



Selected Abstracts



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Colleagues in 4-H Youth Development:

It is our pleasure to share with you the following abstracts that highlight research and/or evaluation projects that have been completed in the Ohio 4-H Youth Development program. Ohio State University Extension believes strongly in the value of research and the evaluation of current programming efforts. The findings included in these abstracts will greatly benefit youth, families, and communities for many years to come.

Since its founding over 100 years ago, Ohio 4-H Youth Development has engaged young people in hands-on learning that is directed by adult/teen volunteers under the direction of paid staff. As found in these research abstracts, youth are gaining new knowledge, learning new skills, and improving relationships with peers and family members.

Our future depends heavily on our ability to carry-out research and evaluation projects and share the findings with all stakeholders in our programs. As you interact with stakeholders in your community, please share with them this publication when appropriate. We feel strongly that this tells a great and important story about the Ohio State University Extension 4-H Youth Development program.

As a viable and important component of this Land-Grant institution, each of us has a responsibility to develop and implement research/evaluation projects that document the impact our programs are having on youth, adults, families, and communities. At the same time, we must be willing to take the necessary steps to make programmatic changes when necessary. We hope, that in future years, the number of abstracts submitted increases as more faculty and staff engage in this important process of documenting our programmatic impacts!

Sincerely

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# 4-H Teens' Participation in Community Service Experiences: Motivations, Roles, and Outcomes



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## Problem

Community service is an integral part of the 4-H experience: Every time they recite the pledge, 4-H members pledge their "hands to larger service." Adolescents who are involved in community groups and extracurricular activities are more likely to volunteer (McLellan & Youniss, 2003; Zaff, Moore, Papillo, & Williams, 2003). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that 4-H'ers will have a high degree of involvement in volunteering and community service activities. Evidence from statewide and national studies points in this direction.

Youth development organizations aim to promote "Six Cs" in youth, one of which is *contribution*—to other people and to the community (Lerner, 2004; Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000; Pittman, Irby, & Tolman, 2001). Therefore, it is important to understand to what degree youth are involved in the process of community service and what they gain from their participation. We designed this study to examine such issues. The purpose of this study was to understand 4-H teens' involvement in community service. Specifically, we wanted to examine: (a) number and types of projects, (b) motivations for participation, (c) roles in the project, (d) relationships fostered between youth and adults, and (e) skills and understanding gained. Furthermore, we wanted to examine relationships among the number of projects, the number of gains, and other aspects of community service participation. Presumably, those who participated in more in-depth experiences would experience greater gains.

## Methods

This was designed as a descriptive correlational study. The instrument used was adapted from a survey developed at the University of Wisconsin (Taylor-Powell, Boyd, & Hermann, 2001). A pilot study was conducted with a group of teen leaders (Fogt, 2001). Teens were questioned about their involvement in a range of possible community service activities. They were then asked to select one activity and to use that activity as the frame of reference for the remaining questions. In addition, qualitative data were obtained through open-ended questions.

The sample consisted of participants attending a state 4-H leadership camp ( $n=105$ ). The average age was 16.5 years ( $SD=1.1$ ) and 78% were female; almost all (99%) were white. They had been 4-H members for 3 to 11 years.

Descriptive statistics were computed for all variables. Previous research led us to examine potential differences based on level of participation (Chaput, 2004). Qualitative data were reviewed for common themes using an open coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

## Findings

On average, youth participated in four community service projects a year ( $M=3.98$ ,  $SD=2.15$ ). One quarter (24%) reported doing the same project each year. Teens were motivated to participate in community service for a variety of reasons. About three-quarters of the teens chose three responses as their primary motivation: helping others, club decision, and fun.



Teens' most meaningful community service experiences could be classified in multiple ways. The projects had a variety of target audiences (e.g., youth, families, elderly, soldiers, homeless, individuals with disabilities). Others did not involve people directly, but involved a physical location in the community such as a park. Another way to classify the service experiences was based on the nature of the work itself. Four general categories emerged: (a) physical work, such as planting flowers; (b) collecting tangible resources (items such as food, clothing, or money) or making items (quilts); (c) organizing an event for others to participate in, such as a party or a camp; and (d) building relationships (mentoring and visiting). A subset of activities involved animals, such as taking animals to a nursing home or a organizing a horse camp.

Teens reported on their level of involvement, as well as adults' involvement, in five phases of community service (decision making, planning, implementing, evaluating, and reporting). Teens were most involved in the implementation phase. In implementing as well as decision making, teens were more involved than advisers were. Club advisers were more involved in planning and evaluating. Both groups were low in reporting.

Many teens reported positive working relationships with adults. However, only one-third indicated that they worked differently with adults. Furthermore, only about one-fourth of the teens reported that adults afforded them meaningful roles (i.e., giving responsibility, asking for ideas, involving in decisions).

Regarding the type of learning resulting from their participation, most teens reported that they understood others' needs because of their participation. About half of the teens gained confidence working on community problems. However, only one-fourth indicated that they learned about the community and met community leaders. Teens reported that social skills and organizational skills were what they learned the most. Less than one-third noted that they learned "a lot" of evaluation and public speaking skills. In open-ended responses, teens said that the most important things they gained were from working with others. Overwhelmingly, they felt good about their community service involvement and thought that it was fun. The greatest gains were personal (i.e., feeling good, having fun, and making a difference), as well as those associated with working as a group.

The number of community service projects was used to represent breadth of involvement. There were a number of significant correlations. Youth who engaged in more service experiences were more likely to learn about the community, to improve teamwork skills, and to report a greater number of gains from their experience. Those who gained more also were more likely to report more reasons for participation. Teens who reported that they learned about the community and its needs were more likely to have gained new skills, developed more confidence in working on community issues, learned to set goals, and met community leaders.

### **Implications**

The results of this study suggest that teens are less involved in some parts of the process than others, and that the amount and type of their involvement is related to their skill development. Other studies of service-learning also found that intensity of participation matters (Moore & Allen, 1996).

Teens who reported that they learned about the community and its needs were more likely to have gained new skills; however, this learning was one of the lowest frequencies reported. Youth may be missing important opportunities to gain from their service experiences.

Teens selected a wide range of projects as meaningful to them. Thus, there is no one "right" project that should be promoted, and there are many routes to positive development. Although projects must be interesting and meaningful, it seems that how one experiences the project is as important as the project itself.

The five aspects of community service examined in this study are consistent with a service-learning model. Considering that youth in this study indicated less involvement in some areas, intentionally adopting such a model could promote more active youth involvement in under-represented areas. Moreover, greater breadth of engagement could result in greater personal growth and commitment to community involvement. In-service training for youth professionals and volunteers could help to promote adoption of effective practices.

Adapted from:

Ferrari, T. M., & Fogt, N. S. (2004). *4-H teens' participation in community service experiences: Motivations, roles, and outcomes*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

# The Ohio 4-H Camp Counseling Experience: Relationship of Participation to Personal, Interpersonal, and Negative Experiences



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## Purpose

Camping has a long history within 4-H. However, most research in the field of camping has focused on camper outcomes. Considering the amount of resources invested, significance of the counselor's role, and concerns for accountability, this descriptive-correlational study sought to identify the contributions of 4-H camp counselor participation to positive youth development.

## Sample

The study was designed as a census of the population ( $N = 2,575$ ) of youth who served as volunteer camp counselors at 4-H residential and day camp programs. There was a 30.25% response rate of camp counselors ( $n = 779$ ). The findings provided a snapshot of who Ohio 4-H camp counselors are through the demographic data collected. It told us that three-fourths of the counselors were female and one-fourth was male with the average age of 15.7 years. The median grade was 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The counselors reported an average of nearly eight years of 4-H membership and four and one-half years of previous 4-H camp participation as a camper.

## Methods/Instruments

Data were collected with two instruments, one developed by the researcher, which described the duration, intensity and breadth (Chaput, Little, & Weiss, 2004) of the camp counseling experience. The Youth Experiences Survey (YES; Hansen & Larson, 2002), was used to measure the extent to which 4-H camp counselors experienced personal and interpersonal development through their participation in the camp counseling experience, as well as the extent of negative experiences they may have encountered. The instrument measured six domains of personal and interpersonal development, as well as five negative aspects, totaling 70 items organized into 17 subscales. All used a four-point response scale, ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 4 (*Yes, definitely*). The positive scales had Cronbach's *alphas* ranging from .72 to .87 with the exception of Identify Exploration (.54). Negative Experience scales ranged from .59 to .82. These figures are consistent with those reported by Hansen and Larson (2002).

## Findings

4-H camp counselors participated from one to six years with a mean of 2.2 years ( $SD = 1.21$ ). They spent an average of 20 hours in planning and training sessions. In addition, they spent more than 13 hours in camp preparation beyond countywide training and planning. Most spent between four and five days at camp. Three-fourths reported they had taught two or more formal topics, and over half were required to prepare lesson plans. Two primary areas of responsibility were supervision in cabins and in groups. More than 60% provided leadership to an average of 2.42 committees, and nearly 90% reported having served on 2 to 3 planning committees.





The counselors reported a high level of Teamwork and Social Skills, Initiative, Identity, and Interpersonal Relationships (scale  $M_s = 3.10 - 3.55$ ). To a lesser extent, they are reported having experiences related to developing Basic Skills and Adult Networks (scale  $M_s = 2.60 - 2.96$ , except for Emotional Regulation,  $M = 3.26$ ). They reported a very low level of Negative Experiences (scale  $M_s = 1.11 - 1.44$ ), although several items had a higher frequency—presence of cliques, stress, unfair workload, interference with family activities, and presence of controlling adults.

There was a significant positive relationship between the number of years as a camp counselor and the development of Leadership and Responsibility. The longer teens were camp counselors, the higher the mean score was on the YES Leadership and Responsibility scale.

### **Implications and Practical Applications**

The current research is consistent with past studies that document positive outcomes for 4-H camp counselors (Forsythe, Matysik, & Nelson, 2004; Garst & Johnson, 2003; Weese, 2002), but extends previous research by viewing it within the framework of organized youth activities (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003). This study was unique in describing the experience in terms of a multifaceted view of participation that reflected significant intensity, duration, and breadth. This view of participation is important because Bronfenbrenner & Morris (1998) argued that if such activities are to be effective in enhancing development, they must take place on a regular basis, over an extended period of time, and become increasingly more complex. This certainly was evident in the camp counseling experience. Accordingly, positive outcomes related to adolescent development were demonstrated.

This research suggests several important implications for those who work with camp programs:

1. Ensure that stakeholders understand that the camp counseling experience provides unique opportunities to promote positive youth development.
2. Capitalize on the potential to promote camp counseling as a workforce preparation experience. Specifically, camp counseling helps youth to develop valuable workforce skills, particularly leadership, teamwork, initiative, and interpersonal skills. Facilitators can assist camp counselors in recognizing the importance of these skills now and in the future, and design training accordingly.
3. Areas where counselors identified negative experiences should be addressed through modifications to counselor training and the supervision provided by adults facilitating the camp program. Additional focus on team building, purposeful mixing of counselors, and discussion of ethical questions prior to camp may help to address some of these negative experiences.
4. Youth development professionals must deliberately include a variety of interesting and challenging activities as part of the camp counseling experience, as well as provide a balance of structure and youth ownership. In doing so, the opportunity exists to increase the youth development benefits.

The 4-H camp counseling experience provides a rich context for positive youth development



# Perceptions of 4-H from Selected Youth in Northwest Ohio Counties



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## Background

Heinsohn and Lewis (1995) report, "...at any given time, participation in 4-H, Scouts, and other youth organizations is skewed with 9 to 11 year-olds comprising over half of the participants." They go on to state, "A look at early adolescence tells us youth leaving these programs to do something else is a part of the developmental process rather than a programming glitch." "They want to pursue interests and activities of their own, not their parents' choosing. Also there are many more activities for teens to choose from, many of which they can access themselves."

According to Thompson (1998), "The three reasons non re-enrollees ranked as most important in their decision to not re-enroll were (1) they were too busy; (2) other activities were more important; and (3) they did not have enough time for 4-H activities."

The researcher concluded that it is not how many activities teens are involved with, but how important 4-H is to them in comparison to the other activities that determine whether they remain in 4-H." Thompson (1998) reports "Ohio 4-H has had little problem attracting preteen 4-H members to the program, but has experienced difficulty retaining the members through the teen years."



Thompson (1998), citing a study by Nichols (1973) reported that "members with high participation levels were less likely to drop out and that participation levels were inversely related to their age at initial enrollment." Thompson also cites Beasley (1980) stating "Peer influence is an important factor in recruitment and retention." In Leeds' (1997) study of 4-H members in Union County, she found "The high school age participants expressed frustration that 4-H sometimes felt as though it was focused toward younger members."

## Research Questions

Does age explain differences in how youth perceive 4-H?

Does gender explain differences in how youth perceive 4-H?

Does parental 4-H alumni status explain differences in how youth perceive 4-H?



## Methods

This descriptive and correlation study was conducted to assess youth perceptions of 4-H. Nine cooperating schools, located in five northwest Ohio counties, were chosen by the researchers. Three written questionnaires were designed and tailored for past 4-H members, current 4-H members, and those that have never joined 4-H. Youth in grades 4, 7, and 10 were invited to participate in the study with 1,462 providing usable data. Comparisons were made to determine rates of response on a series of Likert-type questions. Kruskal Wallis tests were used to determine significant differences in sample responses based on group identifiers. Pearson correlations were used to determine interrelation between various components of the research.

## Results

- As youth age, they are less likely to perceive 4-H as “fun” or “cool”. Average ratings dropped as age increased in youth respondents (with responses ranging from 1-5 based on “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”). The average rating for 4<sup>th</sup> graders for “fun” was 3.53 and for “cool”, 3.37. For 7<sup>th</sup> graders their levels of agreement with “4-H is fun” and “4-H is cool” were 2.84 and 2.75 respectively. When asking 10<sup>th</sup> graders the same questions, their responses for “4-H is fun” was 2.76 and for “4-H is cool”, 2.71. There was a statistical difference in responses on these questions based on age ( $p < .01$ ).
- The level of agreement to the statement “4-H is boring” is different as youth age, with older youth agreeing more with the statement ( $p < .01$ ). The average ratings for 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade respondents were 1.99, 2.76, and 3.00 respectively.
- Females rated 4-H more positively than male respondents and were found to be significantly different ( $p < .01$ ). The average response to “4-H is fun” for males was 2.91 and 3.24 for females. Responding to the question, “4-H is boring” with a Likert-type agreement scale of 1-5 with 1 indicating “strongly disagree” and 5 indicating “strongly agree”, the average response for males was 2.72 and for females, 3.24. Males perceived 4-H as less “cool” than females (2.86 average response from males and 3.08 average response from females) ( $p < .01$ ).
- Parental alumni status explained differences in how youth perceived 4-H ( $p < .05$ ). Youth whose mothers and fathers were alumni of 4-H agree to a higher level with the statements “4-H is cool”, “4-H is fun”, and are less likely to agree with “4-H is boring ( $p < .01$ ).” Several variables were correlated to the likelihood of continued involvement with 4-H. The following variables were correlated with the intent to remain in 4-H: grade ( $r = -.427$ ,  $p < .01$ ), 4-H is fun ( $r = .644$ ,  $p < .01$ ), 4-H is boring ( $r = .597$ ,  $p < .05$ ), 4-H is cool ( $r = .565$ ,  $p < .01$ ), Friends want me in ( $r = .527$ ,  $p < .01$ ), Friends intend to stay in 4-H ( $r = .500$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and My parents want me in 4-H ( $r = .313$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

## Implications

Youth have a variety of activity choices from which to select. If 4-H is to remain successful in meeting the needs of diverse youth it is important to listen to youth perceptions of 4-H. We need to critically evaluate 4-H programs to make sure that they are attractive to youth. Youth will gravitate to those activities that they perceive as “fun”, “cool” and of interest to them. It is important for OSU Extension and Ohio 4-H to realize the challenges of introducing 4-H to new families. Those families with parents familiar with the program tend to support involvement at higher levels and their children tend to perceive 4-H in a more favorable manner.

Extension Educators and 4-H volunteers can apply these findings to their recruitment efforts, realizing additional marketing is needed to attract new audiences and additional support is needed for “first generation 4-H families.”

# Extent of Positive Youth-Adult Relationships in a 4-H Afterschool Program



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2006

## Problem

It is widely recognized that relationships with caring adults are essential for youth to achieve their fullest potential (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998; Blum & Rinehart, 1998; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995). Youth organizations provide an environment where positive adult relationships are known to develop and flourish. Adults who work in these settings create the safe, welcoming environment that provides engaging growth opportunities. Pittman (1992) noted that youth often define their attachment to a program or organization in terms of their relationship with a caring adult. Youth have reported that such relationships matter in their lives, and studies have found these relationships to result in positive outcomes for those youth (Gambone & Arbretton, 1997; Grossman & Johnson, 1999; Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002; Herrera, Sipe, McClanahan, Arbretton, & Pepper, 2000; National 4-H Impact Study, 2001; Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000; Sipe, 2000; Tierney et al., 1995).

The characteristics of adults who work with youth and their role in creating group climate have been discussed in previous research (Astroth, 1996, 1997; McLaughlin, 2000; McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994; Sipe, 2000; Yohalem, 2003). Significantly, a recent study has concluded that the ability of staff members leading an activity was more important to program quality than the specific activity itself (Grossman et al., 2002).

At Adventure Central, an OSU Extension-managed facility that provides after-school programs for youth in Dayton, Ohio, there was a need to understand progress toward reaching program goals, one of which is to foster positive relationships between adult staff and volunteers and youth participants. Questions specifically addressed were: (a) To what extent are participants experiencing positive youth-adult relationships? (b) What factors contribute to the development of these relationships? and (c) How do participant's relationships with adults at Adventure Central compare to those with adults in other contexts?

## Methods

We determined that a multi-method design was needed to address the research questions. We used a survey to examine the extent of relationships between youth and adults and to compare youth-adult relationships across contexts. Relationships with adults were measured with a series of four scales. Attendance information was obtained from program records, measured by the quantity of contact hours during the five-month study period in 2001.

Qualitative observations were conducted to learn more about the processes that contribute to youth-adult relationships. To record observations, we modified a checklist for observing staff interactions in school-age child care programs (Ohio Hunger Task Force, 1999). Three broad categories of behaviors were identified: communication (e.g., uses supportive language), teaching (e.g., assists a child with homework), and conflict or discipline (e.g., handles conflict, disciplines a child).



Descriptive statistics were computed for all measures. Spearman rank correlations were calculated to determine association between youth's relationship with adults at Adventure Central and the quantity of contact hours they received with the adults (Cohen & Cohen, 1983; Witte & Witte, 2001). Additionally, *t*-tests were conducted to determine significance between attendance and responses to individual scale items. Independent sample *t*-tests were also computed for the four adult relationship scales to measure for significant differences between contexts. The tallies for each item on the observation checklist were totaled and calculated as a percentage of the total observations.

### Findings

Mean responses for individual scale items for relationship with adults at Adventure Central were positive, ranging from 2.63 to 2.79, where 3.00 was the highest possible response. Independent sample *t*-tests examining differences in responses by gender found no significant differences ( $t = -.295, p < .05$ ), thus indicating that both male and female participants perceived positive relationships with adults at Adventure Central.

Youth attended Adventure Central between 4 hours and 246.5 hours ( $M = 98.9, SD = 61.6$ ). They were grouped into two groups based on a median split ( $Mdn = 76$ ). A significant correlation was found between attendance and the adult relationship scale score,  $r(41) = .481, p < .01$ . Additionally, there were significant positive correlations between attendance and four of the six scale items (care about me, can tell my problems, tell me "good job," encourage me). Differences on individual scale items were also explored using independent sample *t*-tests. High attendees responses were significantly more positive than those of low attendees for three of the six scale items (trust, tell me "good job," can tell my problems). Independent sample *t*-tests revealed that relationships with adults at Adventure Central were significantly more positive than those with teachers or neighborhood adults. Furthermore, relationships with adults in the home were significantly more positive than relationships with neighborhood adults.

Interactions between youth and adults were primarily one-on-one (84%), with significantly fewer being whole group (9%) or small group (7%). The ratio of adults to youth was at least 1:6. Those interactions most frequently observed were talking to a child in a positive tone, giving a child clear directions, listening to a child, and using a child's name when talking to him or her, indicating that these behaviors may contribute to the development of relationships. Only a small percentage of observations (3%) could be classified as negative (e.g., tone of voice). There were desirable interactions that occurred infrequently or were not observed at all. One likely explanation is the timing of observations relative to the program schedule. Another possibility is that certain interactions may occur only during particular program offerings. Finally, the interactions may not be occurring.

### Implications

Youth trusting adults was the individual item with the highest mean score, which emphasizes the importance of trust in the formation of relationships. Furthermore, youth with greater attendance reported more positive relationships. Presumably, higher attendance would provide more opportunities for contact with an adult, thus providing interaction opportunities. Thus, regular attendance should be encouraged.

This study emphasizes the need for intentional inclusion of features known to contribute to desired outcomes and for understanding the processes that underlie them. Several practical implications are suggested: (1) Encourage long-term participation of youth to realize important program benefits obtained through positive youth-adult interactions; (2) Recruit and select program staff with desirable characteristics; (3) Provide training for staff on youth development principles in general and building relationships in particular; (4) Conduct observation to provide insight into specific interaction practices; (5) Desirable interactions that occur infrequently may be noted and specific steps taken to increase these practices; and (6) Provide positive feedback to and reward staff who exhibit desirable behaviors.

Adapted from:

Paisley, J. E. (2005). *An exploration of youths relationships with adults at Adventure Central, a 4-H after-school program*. Unpublished master's thesis, The Ohio State University, Columbus.

Paisley, J. E., & Ferrari, T. M. (2005). Extent of positive youth-adult relationships in a 4-H Afterschool program. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 43(2). Article No. 2RIB4. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2005april/rb4.shtml>

# Adolescents Perceptions of Motivation, Participation, and Commitment at Adventure Central, a 4-H After-School Program



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## Problem

Interest is growing in programs that address the needs of middle and high school youth (Hall, Israel, & Shortt, 2004; Miller, 2003; Pittman, Yohalem, Wilson-Ahlstrom, & Ferber, 2003; Wynn, 2003). Programs, however, must be “compelling enough to compete with the lure of ‘hanging out’ with friends and other opportunities available in the community” (Miller, 2003, p. 80). Experience suggests that teens desire more flexible program options. Given the importance of regular participation, research about what attracts youth and what keeps them coming back is needed. The purpose of this study was to explore adolescents’ perceptions of their experiences in at Adventure Central, an urban 4-H center in Dayton, Ohio. We addressed why they joined, why they still participated, and what they wanted in an “ideal” program. We chose this age group because participation typically declines in early adolescence (Quinn, 1999).

## Methods

We chose qualitative methods because programs offer intangibles that are hard to quantify (Miller, 2003). Questions for open-ended interviews were modified from Schilling’s (1999) study of an extended day program. Youth participated in a focus group after the interviews were completed. We used Morgan (1997; Morgan & Scannell, 1998) and Krueger’s (1998a; 1998b; Krueger & Casey, 2000) recommendations. All interviews were taped recorded and transcribed. Data were analyzed line-by-line using open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To address validity, two peer reviewers read the transcripts (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). Seven youth qualified as study participants; all were members of the same program group (see Turner, 2002). There were five girls and two boys ranging in age from 11 to 13 years old ( $M = 12.4$ ). They were African American and in the sixth, seventh, or eighth grade, and attending for at least one year. Youth received parental permission in accordance with human subjects procedures.

## Findings

Similar themes emerged across the research questions, although the specific content differed somewhat. As Lock and Costello (2001) suggested, we can view joining and continued participation as a sequential, but dynamic, process. Five youth discussed how an adult (either family or staff member) encouraged them to join. Additionally, three youth reported that staff members were a reason they continued to participate. They were “helpful,” “respectful,” and “nice.” They also “let you do stuff” and “they trust you.” It was different from school, because “here you can pull to the side and talk to them.” However, in the focus group, there was some discussion that adults could be “mean”; it appeared this was related to discipline situations. All did agree that the adults cared for them. Thus, continued participation may be the result of positive relationships with program staff (Ferrari & Hartzell, 2005; Fredricks et al., 2002; Paisley & Ferrari, 2005).

One youth stated that homework assistance was the reason she joined Adventure Central. This theme remained important as the youth discussed why they returned and what they wanted in an ideal after-school program. They noted how academic supports in an after-school program could one day lead to attending college and future success. However, they did not want to do what they considered busy work.



An important aspect of the program was that it was a safe place; being there was an alternative to “getting caught up” in other things. Others acknowledge the importance of both physical and psychological safety (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Gambone & Arbretton, 1997). Three youth discussed some aspect of belonging as reasons they continued to participate. They felt “connected” and “comfortable.” Previous research points to the importance of a sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Gambone & Arbretton, 1997; Osterman, 2000).

Homework assistance discussed earlier specifically encouraged one youth to join. Attending the summer camp was another such opportunity. After previously participating as a camper, this youth anticipated the opportunity to be a teen assistant. He viewed this opportunity as a chance at “having my first job” and to “help kids if they don’t understand things like I didn’t.” Another youth described participating on the Youth Board as an opportunity to “not be just a youth talking, but [to] feel like I’m an important businesswoman.” These activities appeared to foster a sense of what Eccles and Gootman (2002) have described as *mattering*. The importance of having a meaningful role cannot be overstated.

Three youth cited fun as a reason for continued participation, listing different activities, including computers, arts and crafts, social games, and recreational games (e.g., kickball). Fun is an often overlooked dimension in youth programming. Opportunities to have fun allow adolescents to broaden and deepen their interests (Wynn, 2003). Fun can be the “hook” that brings youth into an activity (Wolfe & Carroll, 2003). Exploring what youth find fun and how to embed fun in youth development programming seems to be a necessary step. A variety of activities is needed to maintain youths’ interest (Lauver et al., 2004; Rosenthal & Vandell, 1996).

Two youth reported the friends they have made at Adventure Central were the reason they continued to participate. Similar research revealed that peers play a role in the kind of activities youth choose or choose not to participate in (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2003; Gambone & Arbretton, 1997; Huebner & Mancini, 2003; Lock & Costello, 2001).

Learning was another theme that emerged as a reason youth continued to participate at Adventure Central. Beyond providing homework help, programs can incorporate what is called *enriched learning* (Noam, Biancarosa, & Dechausay, 2002) or *embedded learning* (Pittman, Irby, Yohalem, & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2004). This type of learning is important because the activities produce many transferable skills (Noam et al., 2002; Miller, 2003). These learning activities require intentionality and innovative delivery to be effective. Furthermore, they are often fun!

One youth stated that learning respect for others was important and another discussed how the program had helped her become more mature. Several youth mentioned the code of conduct when describing what someone would need to know before coming to Adventure Central. These behavioral expectations are consistent with calls for establishing positive social norms in youth programs (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). The theme of life skills emerged from the comments of two youth as important program element in their “ideal” after-school program.

### **Implications**

Overall, there were many reasons why adolescents joined and continued to participate at Adventure Central. These youth felt a sense of belonging and safety, received the academic support they wanted and needed, and had fun. They also had developed relationships with adults, were engaged in learning, and fulfilled meaningful roles. These are among the elements considered necessary for effective youth development programs (Eccles & Gootman; McLaughlin, 2000; Miller, 2003; National 4-H Impact Assessment, 2001).

Although themes similar to past research emerged from this study, the process of soliciting youth input is in itself important. Listening to what the youth are saying and what they describe as “ideal” may provide insight into how to attract them and engage their commitment. Adults need to walk the line between providing structured activities that create positive outcomes and providing the youth with what they want. Fortunately, both goals are achievable.

Adapted from:

Turner, C. L. (2002). *Adolescents perceptions of motivation, participation, and commitment at Adventure Central, a 4-H after-school program*. Unpublished master’s thesis, The Ohio State University, Columbus.



# *“The Experience of a Lifetime”*: Alumni Perceptions of the Development and Transfer of Life and Workforce Skills in the Ohio 4-H Camp Counselor Program



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2006

## **Problem**

Ohio 4-H invests significant resources in its camping program. Most research, however, has examined camper outcomes rather than those for camp counselors. 4-H camp counselors are teens who are highly engaged in their camp counseling roles (McNeely, 2004) and it is expected that the skills they are learning in their camp counseling roles are applied to other contexts of their lives. Consistent with research that shows that camp counselors benefit from the experience (DeGraff & Glover, 2003; Dworcen, 2004; James, 2003), recent studies suggest that 4-H camp counselors develop important life skills (Brandt, 2005; Forsythe, Matysik, & Nelson, 2004; Garst & Johnson, 2003, 2005; McNeely, 2004; Purcell, 1996; Weese, 2002).

Preparing youth for the workforce is a major concern in U.S. society (Ferrari, 2003). However, many jobs available to youth offer little opportunity for the development of autonomy and initiative as well as little interaction with adults (Bryant, Zvonkovic, Raskauskas, & Peters, 2004). Therefore, it is important that the 4-H camp counseling experience provide such positive developmental benefits. Findings related to whether camp counselors made career and workforce connections from their experience are mixed. Results indicate that camp counselors believed they developed skills for the workforce (Forsythe et al., 2004), that camp counselors had a moderate understanding of workforce connections (McNeely, 2004), or that the majority of camp counselors believed they have not developed workforce skills (Brandt, 2005).

Thus, this study was designed to examine alumni perceptions about the skills gained and transfer of these skills to other settings as a result their participation. The goals of the research were to examine the following areas from the alumni perspective: (a) their experiences as a 4-H camp counselor, (b) the life and workforce skills gained through their experience, (c) the impact the camp counselor experience had on their career choice, and (d) the unique aspects of being a 4-H camp counselor as compared to the rest of the 4-H experience.

## **Methods**

Four focus groups were held in three geographic locations in Ohio in Winter 2005 using procedures recommended by Morgan (1997) and Krueger (1998a, 1998b). Questions included unique aspects of being a 4-H camp counselor as well as the skills gained and how those skills have transferred to other life contexts (Digby, 2005). Thirty alumni participated. The average age was 22 years (ranging from 18 to 26), and the average number of years they were counselors at Ohio 4-H camps was 4 years. The sample was two-thirds female. Initially, open coding was used to analyze the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Then, two frameworks were used to assist with categorizing the data: workforce skills (SCANS, 1991) and developmental experiences in organized youth activities (Dwokin, Hansen, & Larson, 2003; Hansen & Larson, 2002).

## **Findings**

Overall, alumni of the 4-H camp counselor program thought their experience was fun and enjoyable, yet challenging. They believed they developed important life and workforce skills.





More specifically, leadership, decision making, planning and organizing, communication, interpersonal skills, and teamwork were skills most mentioned. These skills are consistent with other studies examining camp counselors' skill development (Brandt, 2005; DeGraff & Edginton, 1992; DeGraff & Glover, 2003; Dworken, 2004; Forsythe et al., 2004; Garst & Johnson, 2003, 2005; James, 2003; McNeely, 2004; Purcell, 1996; Toupence & Townsend, 2000; Weese, 2002) as well as for youth in other organized activities (Dworkin et al., 2003).

Not only did alumni learn these skills, but they also were transferred beyond the camp setting. Leadership was observed as the most prominent skill that had been applied to other contexts. Other skills mentioned included communication, teamwork, organization, interpersonal, time management, flexibility/ adaptability, and responsibility. The skills mentioned were skills reflective of those needed in the workforce according to the SCANS Report (1991) or those gained through developmental experiences (Dworkin et al., 2003).

Alumni believed they learned these skills by being actively engaged in their roles. Being trusted with the responsibility as a teenager for leading and teaching activities for younger campers was important to them. Several felt that reflection activities at the conclusion of camp helped them think about the skills learned as a camp counselor. However, it did not appear that reflection was included in all camp experiences.

Being a camp counselor was the first time many alumni were able to try out new roles and learn more about themselves. Alumni believed that their counseling experience had both indirect and direct impacts on their choice of a career. Indirect impacts included that alumni considered what type of job or work environment they would like in their future. Direct impacts were that alumni decided that they enjoyed working with children and looked for a career that would enable them to do so (e.g., teacher).

Unique aspects of being a camp counselor compared to other experiences in 4-H were that camp takes place in a different environment where there is little competition. Teens also have the opportunity to be role models and develop a sense of identity.

### **Implications**

This study suggests many practical applications for those who work with camp programs.

- To make adolescents aware of skills needed for the workforce, this topic should be included as part of camp counselor training.
- To ensure that transfer of learning is an intentional part to the camp counselor experience, strategies should be incorporated into the design of counselor training programs. Among these strategies are having opportunities for practice, developing an action plan, and allowing time for reflection (Gardner & Korth, 1997). For transfer to occur, we need to provide experiences that are real and meaningful to learners. Learning also depends on having a base of content knowledge and procedural skills, that is, the skills necessary to solve problems (Basile, 2000). Teens can gain these skills through counselor training programs. As well, teens indicated that actually being engaged in an activity was perhaps the most helpful.
- Adults need to give youth ownership over their roles and responsibilities in order for significant development to occur. In addition, they need to provide appropriate structure and guidance to teens (Larson, Hansen, & Walker, 2005).
- Alumni indicated that having challenging activities was important. To ensure increasing levels of challenge, camp directors should consider expanding youth leadership roles to include that of *counselor trainer* (Homan, 2005). In this model, youth take on enhanced roles training their peers and coordinating the efforts of the counselor team.
- Camp directors should be aware of the importance of initiative to adolescent development. Competencies related to initiative include learning to set realistic goals, exert effort, manage time, and take responsibility. Other aspects of initiative are related to learning communication skills, giving and taking feedback, and taking responsibility within a group.

Adapted from:

Digby, J. K. (2005). *"The experience of a lifetime": Alumni perceptions of the development and transfer of life and workforce Skills in the Ohio 4-H camp counselor program.* Unpublished master's thesis, The Ohio State University, Columbus.

# Parents' Perceptions of Family Involvement and Youth Outcomes at an Urban 4-H Education Center

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## Problem

A recent review of research has recommended that effectiveness of community programs is enhanced when they coordinate their activities with parents, schools, and communities (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Specifically, involving families is a feature that has been associated with high quality programs and with children's academic achievement and overall healthy development. Moreover, results of a recent meta-analysis indicated a "considerable and consistent relationship" between parental involvement and academic achievement specifically among urban students, and these results held across race and gender (Jeynes, 2005, p. 258). However, there are many potential barriers to parents' participation (Eccles & Harold, 1993).

In 2003, Adventure Central was selected as one of two sites for Ohio's Children, Youth, and Families at Risk (CYFAR) grant. The emphasis was to enhance parent involvement in order to promote the holistic development of youth participants and to close the circle of support between home, school, and afterschool. The implementation of this new program emphasis prompted the current study. The study sought to identify parent practices and perceptions in the following areas: (a) practices that support youth's educational success, (b) barriers currently inhibiting parent involvement, (c) interests in educational programming and family involvement opportunities and their delivery method preferences, (d) Adventure Central as a supportive environment for them and their child, and (e) youth outcomes from program participation.

## Methodology

This study employed a multi-method strategy that included a survey and focus groups. A census of parents of all youth attending Adventure Central was undertaken during January 2004 ( $N=64$ ). The majority of the parents were mothers (79%). Most were African American females (86%), and were between the ages of 30 to 49 years old. Most of the families had one to three children (94%), with a total of 95 children overall attending the program. Data were obtained for 82 of these youth (56% female). They ranged from kindergarten through 11<sup>th</sup> grade and had attended the program for varying lengths of time.

Established models of family involvement guided the overall survey development (Epstein, 1995; Harvard Family Research Project [HFRP], 2002; Mulroy & Bothell, 2003). Items were adapted from existing measures (Bailey & Simeonsson, 1991; Caldwell & Bradley, 1984; Gottfried, Gottfried, & Fleming, 1994). Other items were created to address areas desired by program staff. Fifty-four surveys were returned for an 84% response rate. Parents also completed one assessment for each child who attended the program ( $N = 95$ ); data were received for 86%.

As a follow-up to the survey, parents were invited to participate in focus groups in April 2004. Recommendations provided by Morgan (1997; Morgan & Scannell, 1998) and Krueger (1998a; 1998b; Krueger & Casey, 2000) were used to plan the process and to construct the interview questions. Three groups were conducted, with a total of 20 parents participating. Data were analyzed using open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Categories were then grouped into overarching themes.



## Findings

Parents are currently engaging to some extent in practices known to enhance educational success. This is important, because participation in learning-at-home activities has been related to academic achievement (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). However, there was room for improvement, as some practices had a low frequency.

The primary barriers to parent involvement appeared to be work hours. Focus groups confirmed that work demands, scheduling conflicts, full schedules, and the lack of time and energy at the end of the day as the primary barriers to participation in parent or family programs. Conversely, almost all indicated that not feeling welcome by the staff was “never” a barrier.

Many of the parents were interested in information that helps them locate activities for their children and learning how to help their children do well in school, as well as topics related to children’s growth and development and to learning about computers. The methods preferred by over two-thirds of the parents to receive this information were newsletters or evening meetings at the center. They were not as interested in less interactive forms such as TV or computer, or in having someone visit them in their home. Forty percent (40%) stated that it was very likely that they would participate, while an additional 30% stated that it was fairly likely that they would participate family-focused activities.

Overall, feelings about Adventure Central are positive. Parents strongly agreed that Adventure Central is a safe place for their children and the staff are caring and encourage their children. Furthermore, they strongly agree that the staff at Adventure Central is welcoming to them. They were overwhelmingly positive about the staff, and spoke favorably about the homework assistance and program activities offered. They also supported the positive youth development philosophy. This is important, because family involvement is more likely when families are welcomed and trusting relationships and respect exist (Christensen, Rounds, & Franklin, 1992; HFRP, 2002).

Obtaining parents’ perceptions of youth outcomes provided an important perspective. The vast majority indicated that their child is experiencing a variety of educational (e.g., improved reading levels and grades) and social benefits due to their participation. They cited the emphasis on prioritizing homework, support offered through the reading program, and recognition of students’ achievements as factors that helped to develop and improve academic abilities. Parents noted the opportunities that participation in Adventure Central programs has provided for their child (e.g., to serve on the youth board, to go on trips). In addition, in focus groups they noted skills that were not included on the survey, such as time management and working with adults. Parents expressed that the discipline process helps shape these skills and behaviors, and this supports the parents’ own efforts in the area of discipline.

## Implications

By reporting on their experiences and those of their children, parents confirmed that key features of positive youth development (e.g., Eccles & Gootman, 2002; National 4-H Impact Assessment, 2001) are in place. Increased needs for accountability make it imperative to document youth outcomes. The following specific actions were taken to follow up:

- \* A full-time staff member was hired to address family involvement and connections between home, after school, and school environments. He is on-site daily and makes regular contacts with parents, teachers, school officials, and community agencies.
- \* Site staff developed and expanded activities to foster family involvement, including Family Reading/Literacy Nights, overnight camping, and family outings. These activities have been well received.
- \* State CYFAR and site staff revised the program survey instruments and implement an annual evaluation process, which will track progress and inform future directions.

It appears that Adventure Central has developed such a foundation and has put practices into place that should further enhance family involvement, and in turn, child outcomes. Many of the strategies to reach parents are embedded in every day programming.

Adapted from:

Ferrari, T. M., Smathers, C. A., Futris, T. G., Digby, J. K., Cochran, G. R., & Arnett, N. (2005). *Parents’ perceptions of family involvement and youth outcomes at an urban 4-H program*. Abstract of a research and evaluation seminar presented at the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents annual conference, Seattle, WA, p. 49.

# Parents' Perceptions of the Ohio 4-H Cloverbud Program in Relation to Life Skills Development



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## Problem

Studies of life skills in 4-H indicate that participation in 4-H activities was positively related to life skill development (Boyd, Herring, & Briers, 1992; Cantrell, Heinshon, & Doebler, 1989; Fox, Schroeder, & Lodl, 2003; Seevers & Dormody, 1995; Ward, 1996). Studies have taken a variety of approaches (e.g., alumni, participants vs. nonparticipants); however, only one examined the life skills of 5- to 8-year-olds. Scheer and Lafontaine's (1999) study provided a general sense that adults associated with the program (i.e., parents, volunteers, and Extension professionals) believed it was beneficial for this age group. This study, while informative, provided limited understanding of what benefits those stakeholders perceived. Therefore, an investigation designed to solicit parents' perceptions of life skill development for this age group would contribute to existing literature on the topic.

The focus of this study was to explore parents' perceptions of their child's life skills development, program benefits, and activities. Such information would enable those who work with the 4-H Cloverbud program to understand its strengths and identify areas for improvement.

## Methods

We selected focus group interviews as the method suited to obtain parents' perceptions. Recommendations provided by Morgan (1997; Morgan & Scannell, 1998) and Krueger (1998a; 1998b; Krueger & Casey, 2000) were used to plan the process and to construct the interview questions. Questions were designed to elicit parents' understanding of 4-H Cloverbud activities, their benefits, and the development of life skills (Hogue, 2002).

To provide varied geographic representation, three counties in different parts of the state were selected to participate. County 4-H agents provided names and contact information. From a total of 42 4-H Cloverbud parents who were contacted, 25 were interested in participating. Several could not attend due to personal or family-related events. Only a few parents indicated lack of interest. From those 25 parents who had originally agreed to participate, 12 attended one of three focus group interviews. Lack of attendance was due to illness or last minute conflicts with child care. Of the 12 participants, 9 were female. Four served as club advisers in addition to their role as a parent.

Focus group interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Data were analyzed using open coding, a process of breaking down, examining, comparing, and categorizing the data (Straus & Corbin, 1990). Categories were then grouped into overarching themes. To address validity, two peer reviewers read the transcripts and reviewed themes to ensure an accurate interpretation of the data (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002).

## Findings

Similar to past research on life skills development in 4-H, youth were developing skills in social interaction, learning, and personal development. Even though some parents had not heard of life skills, they mentioned three of the five specifically targeted in the Ohio 4-H Cloverbud program: learning to learn, social skills, and self-confidence. In addition, parents mentioned skills that we categorized as *self-care* and *self-direction*. What we have defined as self-care skills



compares with the concepts of “personal safety” and “using resistance skills” that are part of major life skill models used in 4-H (Barkman & Machtmes, 2000; Hendricks, 1996). As well, “managing yourself” and “self-responsibility,” which we termed self-direction, are also recognized as part of the “health” component in these models. The skills related to “self” dimensions might be broadly thought of as representing personal development. Enhancing life skills was important to parents. They identified that by participating in Cloverbuds, children have “a chance to do things independently.” Parents noted that “[having] no social skills limits you,” so having opportunities to interact with others was particularly important.

Parents were able to expand on the particular benefits they saw. They indicated that the learning component was important to them and that “entertainment” was least important. That is, “it is fun, but they are learning while having fun.” Having a group “just for them” enabled it to be geared to the children’s needs. Even at an early age, they are having the opportunity to “speak in public and be comfortable with it.” Overall, 4-H Cloverbuds is appropriate because parents feel it is positive, fits children’s needs, and helps them feel special by having their own group.

Parents acknowledged that structure of meetings facilitates skill development (e.g., punctuality, following directions). They supported the idea of a noncompetitive approach. Two different opinions were expressed about craft activities. Some parents questioned the value of craft projects, while others understood how they fit into the curriculum, that is, that they are “tied into what is being learned.” Activities were seen as the vehicle for life skill development. An approach that emphasizes the experiential learning model is presented in 4-H Cloverbud curriculum (Grawemeyer, Gibbons, Horton, 1994; Safrit & Gibbons 1995; Scheer, 2000). In other cases, they believed the learning is more indirect, as children “learn how meetings are conducted just from being there.”

Although their impression was overwhelmingly positive, parents did address several gaps. One parent mentioned that her child’s club was not organized. Others expressed concern that those without prior knowledge of 4-H may not know about Cloverbuds. Some parents indicated that while there were potential benefits of learning about and experiencing diversity, this was not occurring. Health was another area that could be strengthened. Both appear in 4-H life skill models (Barkman & Machtmes, 2000; Hendricks, 1996).

### Implications

This study expanded on past research by addressing parents’ unique conception of life skills and activities that they believe contributed to their development. They stressed the importance of 4-H as an environment where children are having fun while learning important skills that are beneficial now and later in life. It is necessary to intentionally promote the philosophy and developmentally age-appropriate structure of the 4-H Cloverbud program and these intentions must be communicated to parents. This study has several implications for 4-H.

- \* Parents mentioned a variety of skills categorized under the broad category of health skills as important, as well as diversity. However, these skills are not currently included as specific goals of the 4-H Cloverbud program. Future curriculum could incorporate age-appropriate activities that promote health and diversity.
- \* Educate parents about the goals and life skills of the 4-H Cloverbud program. Be sure the intent of the activities is clear, otherwise the underlying life skills may not be recognized.
- \* Continue to promote active parent participation with this age group.
- \* Educate parents and the community about the variety of 4-H Cloverbud activities that are available. If parents are aware of the specific goals of the program, they are more apt to be able to reinforce this learning in the home and lives of their children.
- \* Develop evaluation strategies that target the children to provide additional validation of the 4-H Cloverbud program beyond parent input.

Adapted from:

Ferrari, T. M., Hogue, C. A., & Scheer, S. D. (2004). Parents’ perceptions of life skills development in the 4-H Cloverbud program. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 42(3). Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2004june/rb6.shtml>

Hogue, C. A. (2002). *Parents’ perceptions of life skills development in the 4-H Cloverbud program*. Unpublished master’s thesis, The Ohio State University, Columbus.

# Exploration of Parent, 4-H Volunteer Advisor, and Sports Coach Support and Pressure on Youth Involved in 4-H and/or School Sports



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2006



## Background

Seven million youth across the United States are involved in 4-H youth development experiences (National 4-H Council, 2003). Over 60% of high school-aged youth are involved in school athletic programs (Child Trends Data Bank, 2003). Research has found that greater parental influence is associated with higher levels of involvement in sports for both boys and girls (Brustad, 1993). Parents, and other adults who work with youth, are socializing agents for young people and they are major influencers of youth self perception and interest in extracurricular activities (Harter, 1978; Brustad, 1993; McCullagh, et. al., 1993). Also, parents have far reaching effects upon youth in terms of their enjoyment of extra-curricular activities and their related self esteem (Harter, 1978; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986; Leff & Hoyle, 1995).

## Research Questions

- (1) Is there a difference in the levels of support or pressure perceived by youth from their coaches and/or volunteer advisors for those involved in 4-H and/or sports?
- (2) Is there a relationship between the perceived support or pressure felt by teens involved in the 4-H or sports activity and their enjoyment of their sports or 4-H activities?
- (3) Is there a relationship between the perceived support or pressure felt by teens involved in the 4-H or sports activity and the likelihood of their continued involvement in sports or 4-H competitive events?

## Methods

A descriptive and correlation study was conducted to assess youth perceptions of parental, coach, and/or advisor support or pressure related to their involvement in school sports and/or 4-H programs. Three cooperating schools were chosen by the researcher representing three different counties in western Ohio. A written questionnaire consisting of three sections (one section for youth involved in school sports activities, one section for youth involved in 4-H programs, and a section for all youth assessing demographic information) was developed.

A total of 433 youth in the eighth and ninth grades completed the instrument. Summated variables were created to analyze parent, coach and/or advisor pressure and support on youth involvement in 4-H and/or school sports. This study used descriptive statistics, correlational statistics, and t-tests to explore research questions of this study.



## Results

- \* Youth reported higher levels of pressure from school sports coaches than 4-H volunteer advisors ( $z=2.00$ ,  $p<.05$ ).
- \* Maternal support and paternal support of 4-H were correlated ( $r=.82$   $p<.05$ ). Maternal pressure and paternal pressure of 4-H were also very highly correlated ( $r=.84$   $p<.05$ ).
- \* Maternal support and paternal support of sports were positively correlated ( $r=.71$   $p<.05$ ). Maternal pressure and paternal pressure of sports were negatively correlated ( $r=-.29$   $p<.05$ ).
- \* Significant positive correlations were found between 4-H enjoyment and: volunteer advisor support ( $r=.39$ ), paternal support ( $r=.36$ ), and maternal support ( $r=.32$ ). A negative correlation was found between 4-H enjoyment and volunteer advisor pressure ( $r=-.25$ ).
- \* Significant positive correlations were found between sports enjoyment and: coach support ( $r=.33$ ), paternal support ( $r=.29$ ), and maternal support ( $r=.31$ ).
- \* The likely continued involvement of youth in 4-H was negatively related to: volunteer advisor pressure ( $r=-.35$ ), paternal pressure ( $r=-.30$ ), and maternal pressure ( $r=-.25$ ).
- \* The likely continued involvement of youth in sports was positively correlated to: coach support ( $r=.22$ ), paternal support ( $r=.18$ ), and maternal support ( $r=.18$ ). A negative correlation was found between coach pressure ( $r=-.12$ ) and likely continued involvement in youth sports.

## Implications

Extension should highlight the need for parents, advisors, and other significant adults to support youth in extra-curricular activities such as 4-H. Although the results of this study indicated positive relationships between adults working with youth, additional work can be done to improve the nature of support for 4-H involved youth. Volunteers and parents can be trained to offer positive support for youth participating in 4-H competitive events.

Extension can play a role educating sports coaches working with youth in organized sports. Our experience training 4-H volunteers can provide a framework to begin offering positive youth development training for youth sports coaches. Many sports coaches receive little, if any, training on the topic of working with youth beyond the technical aspects of their sport.



# Stakeholder Satisfaction with a 4-H Extension Program for Five- to Eight-Year-Old Children



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2006



## Introduction

The goal of Ohio's program for five-to-eight-year-old children is to promote their healthy development by enhancing life skills (social-interaction, self-esteem, physical mastery, making choices, and learning to learn) through developmentally appropriate learning experiences. Features of the program include short-term, success oriented, non-competitive, and fun activities based on a broad array of subject areas.

The program is unique in that it provides parameters as well as a defined framework for adults and youth volunteers to operate within (Scheer, 1997). There is some flexibility, but policies and procedures are in place to maintain high quality and consistency across counties.

To evaluate the K-2 program, a stakeholder evaluation was developed. Stakeholder evaluations are vital for improving a program, indicating stakeholder expectations, and guiding evaluation objectives for the program under review (Lawrence & Cook, 1982). This type of evaluation measures individual perceptions of stakeholders who have a share in the success or failure of a program. Stakeholder evaluations help to modify or adjust a program to ensure it is meeting its goals. The survey gave respondents an opportunity, in an anonymous and confidential method, to voice their opinions about how to improve the program.

The purpose of the study was to learn the perceived value and acceptance level of the 4-H Cloverbud Program. The data will provide information needed to improve the program by measuring stakeholder perceptions of: life skill enhancement, curriculum and program benefits, non-competitive activities; and improving the program through open-ended questions.

## Methods

The sample population consisted of three stakeholder groups: 4-H educators/program assistants, program volunteers, and parents of participating children. Each group is a critical component in the success of the program; without their "buy-in" it would be impossible for it to succeed and be effective. Three surveys were developed with input from educators, volunteers, and state Extension faculty to assess stakeholder perceptions. Each survey was one page (front and back) for quick completion.

All 88 county Extension offices in Ohio received the surveys. The educators and program assistants were asked to complete the Extension Professional Survey and to randomly distribute surveys to program volunteers and parents of participating children.

The surveys consisted of demographic questions (type of group setting, ethnicity, number of children in group, age of children, etc.). There were five Likert items (strongly agree to strongly disagree) asking respondents whether they perceived the children improved in: self-esteem, making friends, decision making, learning skills, and physical skills (movement and/or coordination). Other questions asked whether the curriculum and program was beneficial for their children or group members, and were non-competitive activities best for young children. Finally, there were open-ended questions related to what the respondents liked most and least about the program and what suggestions they have to improve it.



## Results

Of the 88 counties in Ohio, 50% (44) responded to the survey. Thirty-six educators, 8 program assistants, 144 volunteers, and 277 parents returned completed surveys. The following descriptive statistics are percentages of those who responded according to each stakeholder group (that is, parents, educators, and volunteers). Eighty-two percent of the parents, 81% of the volunteers, and 91% of the educators reported the curriculum as beneficial for the children. Eighty-six percent of the parents, 85% of the volunteers, and 98% of the educators/program assistants agreed or strongly agreed that non-competitive activities were best for the children. The stakeholders agreed or strongly agreed that overall the program was beneficial for children (91% of the parents, 90% of the volunteers, and 98% of educators/program assistants).

The respondents were asked to indicate if their children or 4-H members improved in the five life skill program objectives. On a Likert scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," the stakeholders reported that their children improved in life skills as seen in Table 1.

**Table 1**

<b>Life Skill</b>	<b>Parents (N = 277)</b>	<b>Volunteers (N = 144)</b>	<b>Educators/PA* (N = 44)</b>
Self-Esteem	73%	84%	86%
Making Friends	89%	91%	98%
Making Choices	83%	77%	74%
Learning Skills	78%	81%	93%
Physical Skills	61%	73%	71%

(Percentages are based on stakeholders responding as either "strongly agree" or "agree" that their children or members improved in that life skill area). \*PA = Program Assistants

## Implications

The results provided clear information that the stakeholders of Ohio's 4-H program believe it is beneficial and effective in improving life skills for five- to eight-year-old children. The parents, volunteers, and educators/program assistants perceived non-competitive activities were best for children. The research literature has empirically shown that children in this age group have a difficult time handling and understanding competition (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Minuchin, 1977). Even though research has shown non-competitive activities are best for children, it is just as important for stakeholders in the program to accept and believe in this perspective.

Ohio's program was not largely supported when first implemented, based on educator feedback from volunteers and program observations. The current findings support that, over time, if an Extension program is grounded in research and well-structured, it will gain support and become an established state-wide effort. There is always room for continuous improvement, which Ohio is doing by adding additional activities and curriculum within the program parameters and philosophy.

Adapted from:

Scheer, S. D., & Lafontaine, K. (1999). Stakeholder satisfaction with a 4-H extension program for five- to eight-year-old children. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 37(5). Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/1999october/rb2.html>

# Utilization and Evaluation of a Statewide 4-H Volunteer Newsletter



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## Introduction and Objectives

The 4-H Cloverbud Connections newsletter is an innovative, statewide publication targeted specifically for volunteers working with K - 2 youth. The newsletter, published quarterly since 1997, contains five sections: a headline article, 4-H Cloverbud activity section, Campus Connection, snack recipe, and educational articles. Recently, it has been made accessible over the Internet to new audiences at <http://cloverbudconnections.osu.edu>.

There were four objectives of this investigation conducted in 2002: 1) determine the volunteers' perceived knowledge gained from the newsletter, 2) measure usefulness of newsletter sections according to 4-H Extension staff and volunteers, 3) learn how volunteers utilize the newsletter, and 4) identify the greatest challenges faced by 4-H Cloverbud volunteers.

## Methods & Sample

The data collection instruments targeted two groups: 4-H Cloverbud volunteers and 4-H Extension staff. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used. In all, 77 4-H Extension staff [66 Extension educators, 9 program assistants, and 2 with other 4-H program responsibilities (66% response rate)] and 205 volunteers responded to the questionnaire. Volunteers in 49 counties returned questionnaires. Of the volunteer respondents, 98% were female; 78% lived on a farm or in a small town or rural area; 46% had children and/or grandchildren in their 4-H Cloverbud group; 81% had been active as a volunteer for five or fewer years; and 18% were first year volunteers.

## Findings and Results

Volunteers indicated their knowledge gained from the newsletter on a six point scale ranging from 6 = much to 1 = none. Forty-nine percent (95) reported knowledge gained at levels 5 & 6 on the scale. Whereas, 87% (119) indicated knowledge gained at levels of 4, 5, or 6.

Extension 4-H staff were asked how they would rate the newsletter on a variety of issues including usefulness, presentation, educational balance and contribution to the program. They rated seven variables on a four-point scale: excellent, good, fair, or poor (see Table 1). Ninety-five percent of the respondents rated the newsletter's contribution to K-2 programming as excellent or good. When 4-H staff were asked about the usefulness of the newsletter, 64% rated it as excellent for 4-H Cloverbud volunteers and 49% rated the newsletter as excellent for 4-H staff. According to the 4-H Extension staff, 95% indicated that presentation of new ideas via the newsletter was excellent or good, and 63% said the ease to replicate activities was excellent.



**Table 1.**  
4-H Extension Staff Perception of 4-H Cloverbud Connections Newsletter

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Excellent (%)</b>	<b>Good (%)</b>	<b>Fair (%)</b>	<b>Poor (%)</b>
Contribution to K-2 Programming	52.1	42.5	5.5	0
Reading comprehension level	58.9	39.7	1.4	0
Usefulness for 4-H Cloverbud volunteers	64.4	32.9	2.7	0
Usefulness for 4-H Youth Development Educators	48.6	43.2	8.1	0
Presentation of new ideas	47.7	47.7	5.4	0
Ease to replicate activities	63.5	36.5	0	0
Balance of educational and activity content	56.2	42.5	1.4	0

Seventy-three percent of the 4-H staff said they utilized the 4-H Cloverbud Connections 1 – 6 times over the past year for information. When asked about continuing the newsletter as a resource for 4-H Cloverbud programming, 97% were in favor of the newsletter’s continuation.

4-H volunteers and staff were asked to rank the usefulness of each section of the newsletter using a 4-point scale: 4 = very useful, 3 = useful, 2 = not so useful, and 1 = not useful at all. The 4-H Cloverbud volunteers and 4-H Extension staff indicated the most useful sections of the newsletter were 4-H Cloverbud activities and educational articles. Staff deemed each section of the newsletter slightly more useful than 4-H Cloverbud volunteers. However, 99% of the volunteers and 99% of the staff rated the overall usefulness of the newsletter as very useful or useful.

When 4-H Cloverbud volunteers were asked what they most often did with the newsletter – 89% specified they read it and used its ideas or read it and filed it for future use. According to the data, 97% of the 4-H Cloverbud volunteers indicated they wanted to continue receiving the 4-H Cloverbud Connections newsletter.

Both instruments contained questions that required short answers in order to elicit responses rich in meaning. Volunteers provided 461 different responses to the question “What are your three greatest challenges as a 4-H Cloverbud volunteer?” From these, two primary themes emerged: “keeping the Cloverbuds attention/making interesting” (108 responses) and “coming up with new ideas/activities” (57 responses).

### **Implications**

Based upon the study findings, the Ohio 4-H Cloverbud Connections newsletter has received very wide usage throughout Ohio by 4-H Cloverbud volunteers and Ohio 4-H Extension staff. Most importantly, 4-H Cloverbud volunteers are always looking for new activities to use with K-2 youth. In addition, the results can be extended to similar Extension systems beyond Ohio for improving web- and print-based newsletters.

\*Adapted from article approved on July 11, 2005 for future publication in *Journal of Extension*



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